

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 7, 2000 LARSON URGES HOUSE ACTION ON EQUAL PAY LEGISLATION AS 37TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE EQUAL PAY ACT APPROACHES

Announces His Support for the Paycheck Fairness Act

WASHINGTON - As the 37th anniversary of the signing of the Equal Pay Act approaches on **June 10**, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today urged Congress to take action on the Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 541), which he has co-sponsored. The Paycheck Fairness Act would toughen the remedies of the Equal Pay Act; provide training, research, and education; include non-retaliation provisions; and recognize model employers.

Larson is sending a letter today to U.S. Congressman William Goodling (R-PA), Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, urging him to hold hearings on the subject of equal pay as soon as possible.

Larson stated, "This anniversary should serve to highlight the fact that after 37 years, we still have not eliminated the disparity that exists between the salaries of men and women. How many more anniversaries must we mark until we finally have equal pay for women? The wage gap is one of the most pressing issues facing families, facing the economy, and facing female workers in particular. But this is not a "woman's issue," it is a family issue. The money lost because of the wage gap could help families buy groceries, pay the rent, or save for a child's education."

During his time in the Connecticut State Senate, Larson requested a study of state employees to determine if men were being paid

more money than women to perform the same jobs even if they had the same educational background. The study found that there indeed was a wage disparity, and the legislative response resulted in a bill, which he voted for, to change the system and provide equal pay for men and women.

Almost four decades after President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act to address "the unconscionable practice of paying female employees less wages than male employees for the same job."

Tomorrow (June 8) U.S. Senator Jim Jeffords (R-VT), the Chairman of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, will hold a hearing on the subject of equal pay.

According to the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department, a typical woman in Connecticut earns 74 cents for every man's dollar, or \$179 less per week. The gender gap is larger for women of color in Connecticut; they earn \$269 less than men overall, or 61 cents for every man's dollar. The Institute for Women's Policy Research reports that the average annual earnings for women in Connecticut is \$30,541, and the average annual earnings for men in Connecticut is \$43,212.

Highlights of the Paycheck Fairness Act include:

- **Toughening the remedies of the Equal Pay Act**, by allowing compensatory and punitive damages when appropriate. The Equal Pay Act currently only provides for liquidated damages and back pay awards, which tend to be very insubstantial. The bill would thereby put gender-based wage discrimination on equal footing with wage discrimination based on race or ethnicity, for which uncapped compensatory and punitive damages are already available.

- **Non-retaliation provisions**, the bill prohibits employers from punishing employees for sharing their salary information with co-workers. Currently, employers are free to take action against employees who share wage information. Without the ability to learn about wage disparities, it is difficult for women to evaluate whether they are being discriminated against.
- **Training, research, and education**, will be provided for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission employees on matters involving wage discrimination. It also calls for enhancing various research and education programs at the Labor Department.
- **Recognizing model employers**, the bill establishes an award to be administered by the Women's Bureau of the Labor Department, to recognize and promote the achievements of employers that have made strides to eliminate pay disparities.

The Paycheck Fairness Act has been awaiting action by the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections since March.

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